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Do Students in Slovenia Buy Used Clothing for Sustainable Reasons?

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Abstract: The paper examines whether Slovenian students' decisions to buy used clothing are related to sustainability factors. Using data from the ICCS 2022 study, regression and correlation analyses show that political consumerism is the strongest positive predictor of used clothing purchases, while environmental concern shows a weak negative relationship. Although participation in environmental activities and interest in social and political issues are correlated with used clothing purchases, these relationships weaken in the regression model. General environmental attitudes and SES are not significant predictors, while gender differences suggest that boys are slightly more likely to buy second-hand clothing.

Keywords: students, used clothing, second-hand fashion, sustainable fashion, political consumerism.

Introduction

Recently, concerns about the environmental impacts of fast fashion have led to increased attention on sustainable consumer behaviour. Characterised by low-cost and quickly discarded items (Bly et al., 2015), fast fashion contributes significantly to pollution and resource depletion (Koay et al., 2024; Zahid et al., 2023). In the UK alone, it is estimated that £140m of wearable clothing ends up in landfill each year (Hur, 2020). In light of this, sustainable fashion consumption, including the purchase of used or second-hand clothing, is seen as a promising solution to mitigate the negative environmental impacts of the fashion industry (Koay et al., 2024; Masserini et al., 2024; Ögel, 2022). It has been calculated that extending the life of a garment by as little as nine months can reduce its environmental



footprint by up to 40% (Hur, 2020). Consequently, the second-hand and resale market is expected to grow significantly, from \$197bn in 2023 to \$350bn by 2028 (Butler, 2024).

Studies on second-hand clothing have identified several factors that influence people's intention to buy such products. Historically, used clothing has been associated with poverty and the buying habits of people who could not afford to buy new clothes. "Reusing clothes is not new to Eastern Europeans, who lived for decades in economic regimes of shortages where circulating clothes among family and friends was common" (Rulikova, 2020, pp. 5-6). Today, the reasons for purchasing used clothes are much more diverse, including economic (affordability), ethical (environmental concerns), and hedonic (pleasure of finding unique items) factors (Bly et al., 2015; Hur, 2020; Sepe et al., 2024). Recent research has also highlighted mindful consumption and political consumerism as important factors, with people using their market choices as an expression of personal or ethical values (Zahid et al., 2023).

Research suggests that younger generations are motivated to buy used clothes (Masserini et al., 2024; Yan et al., 2015). However, the motivations and values behind their behaviour are still not fully understood. Especially among young people, economic affordability is no longer the only and most important reason for buying used clothes, as social, fashion trends and environmental reasons are becoming more and more important (Cervellon et al., 2012; Ögel, 2022; Yan et al., 2015). Studies also confirmed a strong relationship between environmental concerns and the intention to buy sustainable products (Masserini et al., 2024). Therefore, political consumerism, where market choices are a means of political expression, such as boycotting products from companies with poor environmental or ethical records, may play an important role in sustainable behaviour, including used clothing choices.

The aim of this paper is to investigate how four sustainability-related factors - political consumerism, attitudes towards environmental protection, concerns about global environmental threats and expected participation in environmental activities - relate to students' purchases of used clothing. The research question is: To what extent do these sustainability factors influence Slovenian students' decisions to buy used clothing?

The paper hypothesises that students interested in political or social issues may be more aware of global sustainability challenges, which may influence their decisions to buy used clothing. In addition, socio-economic status (SES) and gender are included as secondary variables. While students from lower SES backgrounds have traditionally been associated with buying used clothing for economic reasons, increasing environmental awareness may be changing this trend. Similarly, while gender is typically associated with different consumption patterns (Cervellon et al., 2012), it is unclear whether this also applies in the context of sustainable consumption practices such as buying used clothing.

Using data from the 2022 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) with a representative sample of 8th grade students in Slovenia, the paper analyses students' responses to a 4-point Likert-type item: "During the last twelve months, how often have you done each of the actions listed below ... Purchase used instead of new clothing". Selected variables from the International and European Student Questionnaires were used, including four composite scales covering different facets of sustainability (students' reports of political consumer behaviour, students' positive attitudes towards environmental protection, students' concerns about threats to the global environment,



students' expected participation in environmental activities) and a national composite index reflecting students' socio-economic background. A linear regression model and correlation analysis were used to explore the relationships between the frequency of used clothing purchases and the selected variables. Crosstabulation was used for gender differences. All analyses were done using the RALSA package, designed for complex survey data such as the ICCS dataset.

By focusing on 14-year-old students in Slovenia, this paper aims to provide new insights into the relationship between sustainability awareness and consumption choices among young people who are just becoming independent consumers.

Research Results

The analysis of the Slovenian students' self-reported purchasing behaviour over the past year showed that 11.8% of students reported buying used clothes 'often' and 18.2% 'sometimes'. A further 19.7% said they 'rarely' bought used clothes, while 50.3% said they 'never' bought used clothes. This means that around 30% of students buy second-hand clothes at least occasionally.

The results of linear regression analysis [Table 1] showed a strong positive relationship between political consumerism and purchasing used clothing ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that students who reported political consumerism behaviours, such as buying only goods that can be recycled afterwards or refusing to buy goods whose production has a negative impact on the environment, are more likely to buy used clothing. This is consistent with the correlation results ($r = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$), meaning that political consumerism was the strongest and most significant predictor in the analysis.

Table 1

Linear regression results for factors related to students' used clothing purchases

Variable	β	SE	t-value	p-value
Political consumerism	0.39	0.02	19.32	$p < 0.001$
Concern about environmental treats	-0.05	0.02	-2.75	$p = 0.006$
Participation in environmental activities	0.03	0.02	1.65	$p = 0.099$
Attitudes towards environmental protection	-0.03	0.02	-1.25	$p = 0.212$
Interest in political and social issues	0.03	0.02	1.67	$p = 0.096$
Socio-economic status	-0.01	0.02	-0.63	$p = 0.526$

Source: author's own development

Interestingly, concern about global environmental threats, such as pollution and climate change, showed a small but statistically significant negative relationship with used clothing purchases ($\beta = -0.05$, $p = 0.006$). This counterintuitive finding suggests that students who are more concerned about



environmental threats are slightly less likely to buy used clothing. However, the correlation analysis supported this finding ($r = -0.04$, $p = 0.056$). This means that students' environmental concerns do not necessarily translate into a willingness to buy used clothing.

None of the other variables tested showed a significant relationship with buying used clothing in the regression model. For example, students' expected participation in environmental activities, such as joining an organised protest to demand more action to protect the environment or telling someone to stop damaging the environment, showed a weak positive relationship in the regression analysis ($\beta = 0.03$, $p = 0.099$), but this association only became statistically significant in the correlation analysis ($r = 0.09$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that while expected participation in environmental activities alone has a positive relationship with buying used clothing, this relationship weakens when controlling for other factors, such as political consumerism.

Students' interest in social and political issues was not significantly related to the purchase of used clothing in the regression model ($\beta = 0.03$, $p = 0.096$). However, the correlation analysis ($r = 0.04$, $p = 0.018$) showed a weak but statistically significant positive relationship ($r = 0.04$, $p = 0.018$), suggesting that students who show a greater interest in political and social issues may be slightly more likely to buy used clothing, although this effect is diminished when considered together with other factors.

The coefficient for students' positive attitudes toward environmental protection was negative ($\beta = -0.03$, $p = 0.212$), suggesting that stronger agreement with statements such as 'every citizen must contribute to reducing pollution' might slightly reduce the likelihood of buying used clothes. However, this result is not statistically significant. The correlation analysis showed a similarly weak, non-significant, but positive relationship ($r = 0.02$, $p = 0.253$), indicating a minimal influence of general environmental attitudes on buying used clothes.

Socio-economic status (SES) showed no significant relationship with purchasing used clothing. The regression analysis revealed a negative coefficient ($\beta = -0.01$, $p = 0.526$), suggesting that higher SES is associated with a slightly lower likelihood of buying used clothes, but the relationship is weak and not significant. Similarly, the correlation ($r = -0.02$, $p = 0.245$) confirmed that lower or higher SES does not play a significant role in predicting whether students in Slovenia buy used clothing.

Perhaps surprisingly, but based on the crosstabulation analysis, boys were slightly more likely than girls to report that they 'often' buy used clothing, while girls were more likely to report that they 'never' buy used clothing. This suggests potential gender-related differences, albeit a subtle one, in the consumption of second-hand clothes within this sample of Slovenian students.

Conclusions

The quantitative analyses showed that political consumerism had the strongest positive relationship with used clothing purchases, meaning that students in Slovenia who choose products based on ethical or environmental considerations are also more likely to buy second-hand clothing. The lack of significance in other sustainability-related aspects, except for concerns about global environmental threats, suggests that the relationship between sustainability and second-hand purchases is complex, multidimensional and selective rather than uniform.



Therefore, these results, including the observed tendency for boys to buy used clothing more often than girls, need to be seen in the broader context of youth consumption styles, such as those identified by Wilska et al. (2023). They found that a luxury brand second-hand consumption style was dominant among the youngest students aged 15, especially among boys, regardless of their economic background. In contrast, a trendy consumption style focused on current fashion trends, such as vintage, dominated among slightly older students aged 16-17, while a sustainable consumption style emphasising ethical, political and environmental values was more prevalent among girls, older students aged 18-19, students from prestigious schools, and students who perceived themselves as being interested in social and political issues (Wilska et al., 2023). Building on these findings, future research could explore how broader social, political, and cultural contexts shape students' decisions to buy second-hand clothing, providing a more nuanced understanding of the complexities behind young people's motivations for sustainable consumption.

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